MINISTRY OF PUBLIC ORDER AND
CITIZEN PROTECTION

GREEK ACTION PLAN ON ASYLUM AND MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Greek Government is establishing an effective, humane oriented response to the current migration challenges including the need to combat irregular migration and to address the situation of vulnerable migrants, in full respect of human rights and the EU acquis on migration and asylum. The Revised Action Plan on Asylum and Migration Management is the strategic implementation of the Government's determination to reform the asylum and immigration processes.

Based upon the experience of actions taken recently, the Action Plan reflects the current state of affairs and includes concrete objectives and deliverables in order to ensure fast and substantive progress.

This Revised Action Plan was designed along the following concepts:

- An effective **First Reception Service** allowing integrated management of all irregular migrants through screening procedures, in order to establish their identity and nationality, to register them, to provide, if needed, medical and psychological support, to inform them on their obligations and rights, especially on their right to asylum and international protection.
- A new independent **Asylum Service** operated by civil servants trained by specialists in the field with the cooperation of UNHCR and EASO, having as sole task the granting of asylum or subsidiary protection in a short period of time, to all those who are eligible for such a status, and a new independent **Appeals Authority**.
- An overall management of the pending asylum cases-**backlog**- by forming a special task force and expediting all the remaining appeals case files within 2013.
- An improved and effective **Returns policy** based on IOM Voluntary Repatriation Programmes with Reintegration Measures and on forced returns in implementation of Readmission Agreements with third countries.
- An effective **Integrated Border Management** according to European models and in the framework of the Schengen Acquis by reinforcing the country's external borders which constitute Europe's south-eastern external borders.

The Revised Action Plan on Asylum and Migration Management establishes a simple, effective and straightforward system which underlines the following important dimensions: the rationalization of the asylum system, the effective

tackling of abuse and the establishment of an effective system of border management and returns' policy.

Chapter 1: First Reception Service

Over the last ten years, Greece experienced a sharp rise of irregular immigration which resulted in the congestion of reception and detention facilities due to vast numbers of mixed migratory flows and asylum applications.

As a response and based upon practices already applied in other E.U. countries, Greece legislated law No 3907/2011 establishing the First Reception Service for an effective and humane management of third-country nationals illegally entering the country, respecting their dignity, by subjecting them to first reception procedures.

The First Reception Service, operated by civil servants trained by specialists in the field with the cooperation of UNHCR and EASO, is responsible for the overall management of illegal border crossings of third country nationals entering the country. Its task is to provide information to migrants, screen them in order to identify vulnerable groups and asylum seekers, offer medical care when needed and/or refer to hospitals, provide psychosocial support etc.

The First Reception Service sets out concrete policies aiming mainly at:

- Informing migrants of their rights, especially regarding international protection.
- Facilitating migrants' contact and close cooperation with NGOs, International Organisations, Legal Aid, etc.
- Effective screening of vulnerable groups and referral to reception facilities.
- Separation of Unaccompanied Minors, Vulnerable groups, Asylum Seekers etc.
- Short stay of migrants that will not exceed 25 days in the Centers.
- Provision of psychological support to migrants.
- Close cooperation with the newly-established Asylum Service – asylum offices will be hosted in the First Reception Centres so that the procedures of examining requests for international protection start immediately after the request has been submitted.
- Identifying genuine refugees and preventing abuse of the asylum system.
- Facilitating Voluntary Returns in cooperation with IOM and other stakeholders.

Furthermore the First Reception Service has developed contingency plans to address increased irregular arrivals in areas where there are no First Reception Centres. In particular the First Reception Service is planning

Mobile Units to operate as rapid response teams to perform First Reception operations on the spot and improve First Reception Conditions mainly in the islands but in the mainland as well.

Chapter 2: Asylum in Greece

In support of the implementation of the "Greek Action Plan on Migration Management and Asylum" various activities, which are foreseen in the Presidential Decree, were carried out by the Hellenic Police in close cooperation with UNHCR and EASO.

To that end, during 2013, the Hellenic Police will develop new activities or continue those already undertaken and enhance the existing cooperation with the above mentioned key partners, as well as with EU Member States. More specifically, these activities consist of the following:

- Ensure effective access to the asylum procedure by:
  - Updating of the existing information material for asylum applicants.
  - Producing of information material for UMS.
  - Establishing a screening procedure for vulnerable persons.
  - Appointment of trained / qualified interpreters for the asylum procedure in 1st instance.

- Improve the quality of the asylum procedure by:
  - Continuing the training seminars of the personnel responsible for the examination procedure (1st instance).
  - Continuing the training seminars of the personnel responsible for the examination procedure (2nd instance).

- Improve the management of the **backlog** cases by:
  - Enhancing the reduction of the overall backlog cases (appeals) through an administrative procedure.
  - Establishing an overall management procedure for the pending appeal cases.
  - Finalizing the examination of the active pending appeal cases.

The new autonomous Asylum Service, which is operated by civil servants, trained by specialists in the field with the cooperation of UNHCR and EASO, was established by law 3907/2011, and will be competent to adjudicate all applications for international protection once operational.

The objective of the Asylum Service is to apply the national legislation and to abide by the country's international obligations regarding the recognition of refugee status and, more generally, granting international protection to third-country nationals who have fled their country due to well-founded fear of being

persecuted for the reasons specified in the 1951 Geneva Convention, or due to reasons justifying subsidiary or temporary protection.

To this objective, the Asylum Service aims at:

- Receiving and examining applications for international protection lodged in Greece and deciding on them, at first instance
- Informing the persons applying for international protection on the application procedure, as well as on their rights and obligations under it
- Collecting and assessing information on the economic, social and political situation prevailing in the countries of origin of the foreign nationals and continuously monitoring the developments in these countries, in cooperation with the competent, for this purpose, other Greek or foreign authorities, especially in accordance with the relevant international agreements,
- Providing third-country nationals applying for international protection, as well as the beneficiaries of international protection, with the identity and travel documents provided for by law
- Processing applications for family reunification of refugees,
- Facilitating applicants with regard to material reception conditions, in collaboration with other competent bodies,
- Preparing legislative texts and administrative acts on issues of its competence and
- Cooperating with governmental bodies, independent authorities and nongovernmental organisations, institutions and bodies of the European Union and international organizations for more effectively fulfilling its mission.

The Asylum Service shall also help design the Greek policy on international protection and shall cooperate with international organisations and the European Union institutions in the areas of its remit.

The new Appeals Authority, also established by the same law and administratively supported by the Asylum Service, will examine, at second instance, appeals against negative decisions on applications for international protection. The Appeals Authority comprises of independent three-member committees with decision-making power, who will be assisted by a professional Secretariat.

Chapter 3: Reception of Asylum Seekers, Vulnerable Groups and Unaccompanied Minors

The reception of Asylum Seekers, Unaccompanied Minors and Vulnerable Groups is an integral part of the management of mixed migration flows.

So far, the Reception System has fallen under the responsibility of different Ministries, namely, the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity, and as of recently, the Ministry of Labor. Following the initiatives of the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection, the competence of Reception will be transferred to this Ministry and in particular to the First Reception Service.

In the light of these developments, the First Reception Service has taken all necessary steps so that the transfer of responsibility from the Ministry of Labor to the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection is done smoothly, maintaining the good practices and experiences and becoming more efficient and more tailor-made to suit the specific needs.

In view of the above, among other, special attention will be given to:

- Training of personnel.
- Maintaining good practices already applied.
- Introducing more efficient ways for operating Reception Centres
- Close cooperation with major stakeholders such as IOM, EEA, UNHCR
- Cooperation with NGOs for the running of the Centers, as well as other actors.
- Quality control.

Thus all issues related to migration and asylum will be under the same roof, resulting in a more efficient management which will follow the same standards and the same procedures.

Chapter 4: Pre-removal Centres

Facing the immense challenge of a large flow of irregular migrants in the recent years, Greece has proceeded to the reinforcement of its external borders, that is, of Europe's south-eastern external borders, resulting in a more than 90% decrease of entries of irregular migrants.

Unfortunately, since not all irregular migrants fall under the scope of asylum protection and/or the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration IOM programmes, Greece is obliged to follow return procedures, based on the European Dublin Regulation and on the agreed Readmission Agreements.

The very low return rate, due to difficulties with foreign consular offices, creates the need for higher capacity in pre-removal centres and bottlenecks in the return process. Thus, Greece is establishing new Pre Removal Centres, respecting the provisions of the European Directive on Returns, with a view to bring up, by the end of 2013, the total capacity of the Pre Removal Centres

from the current capacity of 3.700 to a number of 10.000 in order to cover part of immediate needs.

Chapter 5: Returns – Provision of Services

Implementing an effective returns policy is an added value and a key point issue for Greece in order to handle the migration management and secure the integrity of the asylum system.

For this purpose, the Revised Action Plan focuses on two main directions:

- Supporting and co-financing voluntary repatriation programmes with reintegration measures and
- Applying forced returns when voluntary return is no longer possible. To this extent, the implementation of relevant Readmission Agreements is an important factor.

According to Decision No. 575/2007/EC establishing the European Return Fund for the period 2008 to 2013 as part of the General Programme 'Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows', "the Council Conclusions on the priorities for the successful development of a common re-admission policy of 2 November 2004 emphasise that Community re-admission agreements make an important contribution to an effective joint migration management and play a valuable role in the fight against illegal immigration. They are an important element in the framework of the dialogue and cooperation between the European Union and the countries of origin, former residence and transit of illegal immigrants.

Chapter 6: Border Control

Facing the immense challenge of a large flow of irregular migrants in the recent years, Greece has proceeded to the reinforcement of its external borders, of Europe's eastern external borders, strengthening the Evros border, implementing electronic surveillance at the Evros border operational centres, completing the border fence and deploying patrol boats to strengthen river patrols. These actions have resulted in a more than 90% decrease of entries of irregular migrants.

More specifically the following actions and targeted measures were implemented:

- Enforcement of the institutional framework in order to guarantee the necessary level of National Coordination of Operational Cooperation,
- Controls at the border crossing points according to the Schengen Borders Code,

- More effective management of staff and review of training system and,
- Improvement of infrastructure and more effective use of technical means for the surveillance of the external borders.

The Greek Government having committed itself to completing the establishment of a Common European Asylum System (CEAS), underlines that Solidarity is an essential component and a guiding principle of the CEAS from the outset, as well as constituting a core principle in EU law according to which Member States should share both advantages and burdens in an equal and fair manner.

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